

An interview with Leonard Conrad 7

LEONARD CONRAD

An Interview Conducted by
Dallas Meneely
June 30, 1981

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NARRATOR DATA SHEET

July 14, 1981

DATE

Name of narrator: Leonard ConradAddress: 1528 South Center St. Phone: 232-2917Birthdate: 08-12-18 Birthplace: Indianapolis, INLength of residence in Terre Haute: 48 yearsEducation: Elementary-Secondary-1 semester CollegeOccupational history: Terre Haute Brewing Co. 25 yearsState Senator 16 years Vigo County Clerk of Circuit Court 8 yearsHaley Bros. Construction 13 yearsSpecial interests, activities, etc. Politics, government, history,
sportsMajor subject(s) of interview: PoliticsNo. of tapes: 1 Length of interview: 9/10 hr.

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1 July 1981		Haley Bros. 2031 S. 13th Terre Haute	Dallas Meneely

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LEONARD CONRAD

Tape 1

June 30, 1981

At Haley Bros. Construction Corp., 2031 South 13th St.,
Terre Haute, IN 47802

INTERVIEWER: Dallas Meneely

TRANSCRIBER: Kathleen M. Skelly

For: Vigo County Oral History Program

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DM: I'm speaking today with Leonard Conrad. My name is Dallas Meneely. The date is June 30 and we're located at Haley Bros. Construction Corp. at 2031 South 13th Street.

Leonard, to get started, other than politics what kinds of occupations had you been involved with?

CONRAD: Well, I was employed with the Terre Haute Brewing Company for 25 years. I started as an apprentice bottler and worked in the bottling department for about 22 years and then went into sales and became regional sales manager for the lower half of Michigan, the state of Indiana, and the upper half of Kentucky. Then I came back and was [appointed] sales manager in the state of Indiana until the brewery went out of business. [I then worked out of] Chicago for the brewery that had purchased the copyright to the Champagne Velvet label.

DM: How old were you and what year was it that you first really became involved in politics in Terre Haute in Vigo County?

CONRAD: Well, I [was 29 years of age when I] first got involved in politics. [It was] in the mayor's race when Ralph Tucker was elected the first time. At that time I supported Lenhardt Bauer, who was Ralph Tucker's opponent in the primary. That was the first loss I sustained [in the year 1947].

DM: Did you suffer because of that eventually or . . .

CONRAD: No, Ralph and I became . . . I wouldn't say close friends but we were friends. We differed [politically] quite a bit. Didn't see eye-to-eye. Of course, that's politics.

DM: You sought the county clerk's office, didn't you? Was that the first office you sought or did you seek the state senate?

CONRAD: No, I ran for state senate in 1948, was successful and was reelected state senator in '52 and reelected in '56. Then I ran for county clerk in '60 and was successful, ran for reelection in '64 and was successful. And then in '68 I ran for the state senate again and was successful.

DM: Was your family involved in politics here or did . . . were you the first generation that became involved?

CONRAD: I was the first and probably the last the way it looks.

DM: Where are you from?

CONRAD: Originally, Indianapolis. I came over here when I was a sophomore in high school.

DM: What year was that?

CONRAD: About 1933.

DM: How did you happen to get interested in politics? Was there any particular person that stirred your interest, got you going?

CONRAD: No. At that time I was quite active in union affairs, and the brewery workers' union was independent and had been expelled from the American Federation of Labor. In Terre Haute, or Vigo County, we had a peculiar labor group that was unique so far as the entire country was concerned. The United Mine Workers were separate from the A. F. of L. Brewery workers were independent. The Brotherhood or Railroad Trainmen had their own organization. So, we organized a group here called the Vigo County Civic Labor League. This was back in the late '30s or early '40s. We met once a month, usually at the YMCA. We'd invite one of the professors from the University to talk to us and then we'd have a question-and-answer period for probably two or three

CONRAD: hours, discussing labor problems and the working man's problems.

This group, while meeting one night decided because of the number of people we represented that we should have some labor representation in the Indiana legislature. And I always say by the process of elimination, I became the candidate. The rest of them said they were too busy, and I agreed to run. And that's how I actually got into it.

In my first campaign in 1948 I had probably as much labor support as any candidate's ever had here in Vigo County. Lawrence "Dutch" Letzkus, a former county chairman, and Howard O'Loughlin, who was quite a Democratic power at that time, said that I was fortunate enough to have built up probably the best working organization any candidate had come up with in this county. I didn't run with party support the first time. I had some people in the party who were supporting me, but so far as an outright endorsement in the primary, I didn't have it.

DM: What was the political situation like in this area at that time? It was dominated by the Democratic party?

CONRAD: In 1948, it was dominated by the Democrats. That's when Harry Truman was elected. But prior to that, in 1946, the county went totally Republican with the exception of the prosecutor's office and the county assessor's office. Billy Bell was elected county assessor as a Democrat and Jack Jett was elected prosecutor as a Democrat. And the remainder of the county went Republican in '46. The Democrat party got out a very low vote that particular year and that contributed to the defeat. Then in '48 we came back and swept everything.

DM: So, the Democratic dynasty really didn't begin to evolve until '48?

CONRAD: No, it was strong prior to that time. But then I think they probably got a little over-confident and didn't work at getting the vote out and getting the people registered as they should have. And the vote, I think, in '46 dropped down to something like 17,000 in the general election. And the Democrats should get out at least twice that much in a general election.

DM: You would . . . you make a party strong in an area by building a strong precinct committee organization or is it done through some other system?

CONRAD: At that time that was the primary way of campaigning. The committeemen at that time exercised quite a bit of influence within a precinct simply because of the fact the patronage system was extremely strong then. And a committeeman could secure jobs for individuals within his or her precinct. He could get streets fixed and the alleys cleaned and things of this nature. And a lot of this is gone today. And then I think the advent of television, instant communication, has more-or-less contributed to the demise of the influential committeemen so far as exercising political power within his own particular precinct.

DM: Was the Ku Klux Klan an important element in politics in this area back in the late '40s?

CONRAD: Not in the late '40s, no. It was prior to that time. At one time it was a very dominant factor in politics here.

DM: Did you feel any residual effect of the Klan influence in politics when you became involved in '48?

CONRAD: No, not directly because the Klan at that time was very low. The only resentment that I experienced (and this was primarily in 1960 when John Kennedy was elected) there was quite a bit of publicity -- that is printed publicity -- that was circulated particularly in the southern part of the county, with reference to the Catholics on the Democratic ticket. And I happened to be a Catholic. I was pointed out as one, Joe Silcock, Harry "Keeter" Brentlinger also These pamphlets were passed out at some of the churches located in the southern part of the county. And it took excerpts out of the K of C Knights of Columbus oath and talked about the Pope going to bring his Navy over after Kennedy was elected, things of this nature. But that's the only experience that I had.

DM: Well, the political structure in Terre Haute was a lot like other cities around the country that

DM: had Democratic-dominated politics. It was fairly Irish Catholics at the time, wasn't it?

CONRAD: Well, there were Irish Catholic and then there was a predominant German element in this area -- a lot of German Catholics in Vigo County. And then the ethnic groups in the 7th Ward, particularly in Precinct F, which contained many Polish, Hungarian, Romanian, French, and other ethnic groups, and they were predominantly Democrat. In fact the 7th Ward was considered the best Democratic ward in Vigo County at that time.

DM: Did you have to cater to any of these particular ethnic factions to become . . . to get elected in Vigo County?

CONRAD: Back then -- thirty years ago -- each ethnic group had a leader. And if you could convince that leader that he should support you and you received his commitment, why then he usually passed the word to his people as to who to support.

DM: Was there a lot of solidarity among these groups? Did they hang together pretty well?

CONRAD: Oh, yes. At that time the Romanian Church was quite active. They had their own hall which is now gone. The church is still there but with a very limited congregation. I doubt if they have 20 for their Sunday Masses.

And the Hungarian Hall is still in existence and is still used by both parties prior to elections. But that population has decreased, and they don't all stay in that same area like they did at that time.

DM: What's happened to these groups? Have they just intermarried and blended in with the rest of the city population?

CONRAD: They've married people with other national origins. And they've moved to various parts of the county and their social functions have more-or-less ceased. I think about the only one, the Romanian Church still has a yearly dinner that the politicians are invited to. But they now have it in the basement of the church and the attendance is limited. They used to have it at the Hungarian Hall and that would

CONRAD: hold probably 200 people. And a group from Indianapolis always came over for that dinner. All the ladies in the community brought food in, quite a dinner.

DM: I've heard it said that Terre Haute has never had a Catholic mayor, but we've always had Catholic party chairmen in the Democrat party. Do you find that to have been the case or . . .

CONRAD: We've had mostly Catholic county chairmen. Those that I've been associated with, "Dutch" Letzkus was Catholic and then Bob Kelly succeeded him. [He] was a Catholic. And Ralph Berry succeeded Kelly, and Berry was not a Catholic. And Ed Stapleton succeeded Berry and he wasn't a Catholic. And I succeeded Stapleton and I am a Catholic. And Joe Anderson followed me and he is a Catholic. So, this is more-or-less true.

DM: Getting to some specifics of individuals who were involved in politics at the time, could you describe the good and the bad qualities of Ralph Tucker?

CONRAD: Well, Ralph Tucker was very shrewd, [a] very astute politician. To describe him as an officeholder, you'd have to say that he was a penny pincher. I don't know of anybody that made more effort as a mayor of the community to keep the tax rate down as Ralph Tucker did. Of course, this was beneficial at election time. He had a peculiar trait, after an election was over, (he took his friends for granted) he went out and tried to cultivate all his enemies -- those people who had opposed him during the campaign. And he was quite successful in doing this. Because in politics if you're running for office and you continue to seek reelection, there's no way you can keep from making enemies. And these enemies continue to build. So, the smart politician and practical politician tries to, as the old political saying is, you get back in bed with your enemies. You'll eliminate some of your opposition in the future. Ralph Tucker was a master at doing this.

DM: Is there any truth to the belief that Tucker sabotaged Don Smith's campaign in 1967?

CONRAD: No. I was a candidate at the same time. I ran for mayor in 1967 and was an opponent of Don Smith's in the primary, along with Judge Harold Bitzegaio's brother Bill. The three of us ran. There's no question in my mind that Don Smith had Ralph Tucker's blessing at all times. He surely wasn't supporting me and he wasn't supporting Bill Bitzegaio because Bill, I think, only got a couple thousand votes. And Tucker with his organization could deliver 2,000 votes overnight to you if he was really supporting you. But so far as sabotaging Don's campaign, I know he did not. I think what happened in that campaign primarily was people had seen 20 years of Ralph Tucker's administration. So, then you might say that everybody under 35 in the city of Terre Haute had never heard of a mayor in the city with the exception of Ralph Tucker, and they wanted somebody else. And they wanted a change. After 20 consecutive years of Democratic administration people begin to think, "Well, I don't like my street and I don't like my alley and maybe if we get somebody else in there, why we might get something. We'll just try it and see what happens." And I think that's primarily the reason that Don Smith lost. Then the fact that Don Smith had recently been president of the Terre Haute Chamber of Commerce, was also a banker -- all these things contributed to the support of a lot of working people for Lee Larrison.

And Lee Larrison talked the working people's language. You could hear people sitting at the bars and restaurants and one place and another and they would be saying, "Well, Larrison might be a little crude, but, by God he tells the truth and he don't give a damn what he says and I like that." And these people were normally Democratic voters. You could go out into the 7th Ward and the 4th Ward -- predominantly Democratic wards I took Judge Charles K. McCrory with me one day, and we went all through these sections just driving up and down the streets. And I would say in a two-hour period I saw more Republican bumper stickers with Larrison's name in the 7th Ward and in the 4th Ward than I'd seen in all the Republican campaigns combined in the previous 20 years.

DM: Now, those wards were primarily . . .

CONRAD: Primarily Democratic and Larrison was well-known out in that part of the city. He had been in the drug business out there. He operated a drugstore at 15th and Locust and did a lot of favors for many people out there during the Depression. The families didn't forget it, particularly their children. But I think that they just felt that it was just time for a change.

DM: Do you know of any corruption, or do you think there was much corruption in the Tucker administration? Do you think there was any kind of illegal activity that might have gone on under the table or . . .

CONRAD: Oh, that's always possible. I was never in a position where I'd know. As I said earlier, Ralph and I had our disagreements. And there's always that possibility in any administration. Whether it happened in his, why I wouldn't have any way of knowing.

DM: The Democratic party . . . you touched on this before in your explanation of why Smith lost to Larrison, but the Democratic party seems to have been losing its hold on the county and Terre Haute over the years, slowly but surely. To what do you attribute that loss of popularity in this area?

CONRAD: Well, I don't think it's so much a loss of popularity as I do the change in the entire political system. I think the United States Supreme Court ruling of one-man, one-vote has changed things. The merit system in the state of Indiana has changed things. The patronage system has changed greatly. Today if a person is elected . . . if he follows someone into office that is of opposite political faith, he has to be real careful in changing employees because he might find himself on the end of a lawsuit charging violation of someone's civil rights. This has weakened the parties tremendously. Constant criticism by a lot of the media with reference to the 2% system has weakened the parties. The cost of operating a political campaign is extremely expensive to the party itself and is getting prohibitive for a man locally to run for a political office. I use myself as an example. I was told this week that the clerk of the Vigo County Circuit Court makes \$17,000. When I went into that office in 1961, I was making \$15,000. So, you can see that

CONRAD: there's been less than a 15% increase in the pay in that office in the period of 21 years. This is ridiculous because you have spent that much money in a campaign.

DM: What kind of a relationship did Democrat officials have with local businessmen?

CONRAD: I think in Ralph Tucker's case he had an excellent relationship, particularly with the downtown area.

The business community, not only here but throughout the state and throughout the country, is primarily Republican. And this has been a fact of life in this country for many, many years. And primarily the basic difference between the two parties is that the Republican party seems to be more business-oriented and the Democratic party seems to be more people-oriented. It's always been my experience and I think the experience I gained in the legislature probably proved this more than anything else because the principal spokesmen for industry and business in the state of Indiana are members of the Republican party a great percentage of the time.

DM: Who were the key businessmen that were active in politics in Vigo . . . and Terre Haute along in the late '40s and '50s?

CONRAD: Well, of course, Anton Hulman was always interested, but he never took an active part. I would assume, although I never received a contribution from him, I understand that he did contribute to certain politicians. I think locally Anton Hulman was always considered a Democrat. Nationally, I think he was considered a Republican because business's biggest benefits come from the Congress rather than from the state legislature. And in a community as Democratic as Terre Haute has been, particularly if one lived in the city for a number of years, it would be to someone's benefit to be a member of the Democrat party in this county. But a lot of the business and professional people never participate in a primary election, so as a consequence you don't know whether they're Democrats or Republicans.

DM: What kind of a relationship existed between Republicans and Democrats? Were they fairly friendly?

CONRAD: Well, I always was. I think this idea that because someone's a Republican or a Democrat, to be of the opposite political faith that you are . . . you can still oppose someone on political grounds but still retain friendship. This is another thing that's happened to political organizations that has weakened it. I've seen a great reduction in party loyalty not only on the part of officeholders and candidates, but the general public. When I first started running, if a Republican walked into the voting place and asked for a Democrat ballot in the primary, he was immediately challenged; and the Republicans didn't want to give him a Democrat ballot. And the same thing happened if it was a Democrat asking for a Republican ballot.

And today they think nothing of this. You can go to the courthouse now and check the registration files and you'll find person after person, I'd say, a great big percentage are voting for both parties in separate primary elections. And this is something that has changed politics dramatically.

DM: Why do you feel that prostitution was not outlawed? Or why was it condoned in the city for so long?

CONRAD: Well, to begin with you can't legislate morals. Prostitution is against the law in Indiana. When you close a house of prostitution, these ladies who work in these houses are still going to ply their trade someplace else. The natural place for them to go is to the motel and hotel bars to pick up their clients. And so you may have a group that's looked upon with a great deal of criticism sitting at the next table to you while you're having a friendly drink with a business associate in one of the local motels.

And so far as prostitution in the last 25 years in this town is concerned, it's been very low. I can remember back in 1935 and '36 you had houses from Water Street to 4th Street from Wabash Avenue all the way to Mulberry. And at one time it was claimed there were at least 300 to 350 prostitutes working the red light district in the city of Terre Haute. But everyone knew where they were, and they

CONRAD: went in to the Board of Health for an examination. Their certificate was hanging on the wall. And if they didn't show up, the police went out and got them and brought them in for their examinations. I don't think you're going to eliminate it. It's just like gambling or anything else. They say it's the oldest profession in the world, and it might be the truth.

DM: Do you think there was any kickback to police or local officials that might have played a part in its being condoned?

CONRAD: Oh, I suppose that possibly could have happened. But again, in the two political offices that I held, I had nothing to do with the regulation of these things. I always labored in Indianapolis under the impression, as I said before, that there's no way you can legislate morals. That's an impossibility. I think that's the duty of the churches and the duty of parents. And this is probably one of the things that we're a little bit lax in at the present time.

DM: Do you remember who Joe Traum was?

CONRAD: Yes. I knew Joe quite well. I first got acquainted with Joe Traum back in, oh, probably 1945. At that time I was a member of the C.I.O. council here in this community. We had a small club in the 400 block on Wabash Avenue and had a little bar up there. Joe had the Show Lounge just west of 7th Street on the south side of Wabash. He then opened the Manor House on Margaret Avenue, and he turned the Show Lounge over to the C.I.O. This was back in the days of the slot machines. We didn't have to pay any rent; all we had to do was maintain the inside of the building, pay the utilities, and have his slot machines in the club, and he took his percentage out of the slot machines and we retained the rest.

Traum came from St. Louis and always treated me fine. Joe Traum had more of a bad reputation than I think he was actually guilty of.

DM: Do you think he was associated with the national crime syndicates in any way?

CONRAD: I don't know about any national crime syndicate association. It was my understanding he came from

CONRAD: a group called the Egan Rats out of St. Louis when he came to Terre Haute. Joe Traum ran the Manor House on Margaret Avenue. It was as fine a food establishment and so-called night club or supper club -- with good entertainment -- as we've ever had around here. It was clean. Everything was above board and at that time gambling was permitted. He had his roulette wheel and he had his crap table, but that, back in those days, [was commonplace]. There was a lot of places had.

DM: Moving on to a little later in Terre Haute history, what do you think the good and bad qualities were of Bill Brighton as mayor?

CONRAD: Well, I supported Bill when he first ran for legislature, and he was probably one of the better legislators we ever sent to Indianapolis. He worked extremely hard over there. Then he started going to law school, drove back and forth while he was employed at the Tribune. [He] went to law school at night, and then he worked for the Democratic state central committee. While he was working for the state central, he attended law school. I was always surprised that he never finished because he didn't have too much time left.

I think Bill's biggest failure [was] that he wasn't as cold a politician as he should have been. Now, I think that the time he was in the mayor's office there were some changes he should have made insofar as help was concerned. [But] he just couldn't bring himself to fire anybody regardless of what they done to him. And I think in the end, that's probably what caught up with him.

DM: Over the years there have always been complaints that certain mayors have not done as well as they should in attracting industry and improving the community than others, they say, have. Which mayors, in your opinion, did the best as far as improving the community and attracting industry is concerned?

CONRAD: Well, you almost have to say Tucker. Of course, a lot of it's due to the period of time that he served, as he had more time to bring more in. It's not so much the mayor's job to bring in industry as it is the Chamber of Commerce, and the business element, and the make-up of the entire city and the

CONRAD: county. You've got to have things that's going to attract industry. By this I mean that you've got to have facilities such as water and sewers and the proper tax climate. And I think the community probably has been remiss. You know some people . . . a particular group of people become satisfied with the size of the community, if they're doing all right financially themselves. And I think this has been some of the history of Terre Haute. I had one of the ex-presidents of the local Chamber of Commerce tell me one day, when I asked him a similar question as to what you asked me, he said, "Do you know how many people in this community have \$50,000 in the bank?" Of course, that wouldn't be any money today, but at that time it was. And I said, "No. I don't have any idea." "Well," he said, "when you find out, you'll understand why this city never got any bigger."

Now, we had a low wage scale in this community for a number of years. And they were afraid that if you brought in big industry that their wage scale would siphon off their help. And then to compete for help, they'd have to pay the wage scale that some of the bigger industries were paying. This town's been known as a labor town. You've got industries like Pfizer and Commercial Solvents. There's no way you're going to organize those people because management treats them right. I don't think unions could do anything for them. And as a consequence, they've never been successful in trying to organize them.

DM: So, you think there was a bit of foot-dragging on the part of certain small businessmen in the community.

CONRAD: Foot-dragging on the part of the business people and the community and, I think, particularly the Chamber. I think it's been real lax in the past in promoting the city. And I think the fact they were getting cheap labor was a dominant factor.

DM: Some people have said that the county clerk's office is really the most powerful position in the county, even including the mayor's office. How would you react to that statement?

CONRAD: Well, I think where it got that reputation is when I went into the clerk's office, I had more employees than any individual county officeholder, including the sheriff. And with the patronage system I employed as many precinct committeemen as I could possibly employ. And that gave me some influence. If the employee was loyal to me and wanted to go along with the candidates I was going to support, that gave me pretty good clout when it came election time. Then if I was instrumental in someone being nominated and elected to office, why then it would be only natural I could go to him for favors. And this is the way the game works. So far as . . . and there's been talk -- and there will always be talk -- about the clerk has control over election procedures. It does give you the additional majority vote needed on the election board to run the election. And a lot of talk has been made about the absentee ballots and allegations have been made about what happened to them. But nothing of this kind has ever been proven. I worked with some fine Republicans when I was clerk. Dorothy Duddleston had been a schoolteacher here for a number of years. Her father was a very prominent Republican politician back in the '20s and '30s. And Joe Jones, who was Republican county auditor at one time, was also on the election board. And when we checked absent ballots, they were always present. So far as the allegations that have been made in the past, they bear no substance.

DM: You talked earlier about having run for mayor and I'd be interested in finding out some more specific details about that campaign and why you feel you didn't win that particular campaign.

CONRAD: Well, I ran primarily because . . . two reasons probably, maybe more. I felt that I'd been on, you might say, both sides of the table. I'd been active in organized labor. I knew what the working people needed and were entitled to, some of the problems they had. I was a member of the legislature for 12 years. I thought I understood some of the problems that industry faced, not only Terre Haute but in the state of Indiana. And at that time I had, you might say, a pretty wide acquaintance with a lot of people in the state of Indiana. And I felt that through the acquaintances that I'd made throughout the state that I might be able to do something for the city.

CONRAD: Secondly, I was opposed to Ralph Tucker dictating who the next mayor was going to be. In this case, it was Don Smith. And I had nothing personal against Don Smith. And then Bill Bitzegaio got in the race and was a brother of Judge Bitzegaio's. And the Judge and Ralph Tucker were extremely personal close friends. So, it was only natural that I assumed that Bitzegaio was put in the race because his name would be ahead of mine on the ballot which would take some votes away from me. Tucker threatened right up to the last minute, you might say -- until 3 o'clock in the afternoon on the final day of filing -- that if I got in the race, then he was going to pull Don Smith out of it and he was going to file himself. So, I mailed my declaration of candidacy to myself. And I mailed it on the last day of filing, and we received it in the mail. At that time if it was postmarked before midnight, you had to accept it after you received it. So we received it the following morning, and I had Howard Stevens from the Tribune in the office on the following day when the mail came in and he observed each late filing that came by mail. And that's how I entered the thing.

When the campaign started, of course, I had only had about six weeks to campaign in. And I received quite a bit of support. I don't regret anything that happened. But the organization -- Bob Kelly opposed me. Tucker, of course, was opposed to me. And that didn't leave me too much of the Democratic party to go out and fight my battles for me. So, I had to do most of it on my own and through personal friends. Another reason for running . . . when you've been elected as many times as I had at that time (I'd been elected five consecutive times), there'd been an enormous amount of people that had been involved in my campaigns. People had given me political contributions and had got out and walked door to door in my behalf. They were asking me to run. And I felt that I owed them, thought that I was obligated to them to a certain extent. And I decided I would run, much to my regret. But then I was fortunate enough to come back the next year and be elected to the legislature.

DM: Back in the '40s again, what did it take to be a successful political figure, financially? Did you have to have money?

CONRAD: Sure, you had to have some but not nearly the amount that you need today. When I first ran, I was working at the brewery and I had been president of the union, secretary-treasurer, and business agent for three years. I sat on the scale committee and on the grievance committee. In fact, I didn't own an automobile in 1948, the first year I ran for office. And I borrowed cars off of the men who were working in the plant with me. A man would come to work at 4 o'clock, and I'd take his car until the 11 o'clock shift would come in. I'd bring it back so he'd have it when he went home at midnight. And borrow a car off of somebody that went to work at 11 and stay out until 2 o'clock in the morning, making all the coffee joints at 12 and 1 and 2 o'clock. It wasn't easy and I couldn't today, but it was an experience in itself.

That first campaign for state senator . . . the night of election in November, I was sitting on the front porch in the porch swing. I think I had about \$37 in my pocket, and that's all I owned at that time. That was all of it. But I don't think I spent too much. Printing was a lot cheaper. You didn't have television to fool with. You'd run a few newspaper ads and in certain precincts where the committeeman was extremely active, why you gave that committeeman money for gasoline or to help him get the people to the polls and things of that nature. But the first time I ran why I had a group from the brewery that volunteered to use their automobiles on election day to save me some money.

DM: Speaking of the Terre Haute Brewery, did it serve as a sort of a spawning ground of . . . like a political school where people learned about local politics? Didn't a lot of local officials come out of the Terre Haute Brewery environment?

CONRAD: Well, yes. Judge Bitzegaio worked down there when he was going to school. We were extremely active politically, put it that way. Our International constitution was very strong with reference to voting. This went back during World War I. [There was a] great influx of Germans into the brewing industry into this country when they migrated to America. And then [there was] the bitterness of a lot of people in this country toward the German race during World War I. And the International was very specific. [It]

CONRAD: insisted that all members register and participate at the ballot box.

And at that time we had the right as a local union to fine those members who did not participate in the election process. And we did. Every year this was one of my jobs down there. I took the complete membership list of the local union, took it to the courthouse and had everybody's registration checked. And those that weren't registered were notified. And then we rechecked after the election to see if they had registered and voted. And if they didn't, we fined them for it. Seems a little cold that you'd have to force people to do it. But even today in some of the old countries overseas they still fine people.

END OF SIDE 1

TAPE 1-SIDE 2

DM: How was the city of Terre Haute and Vigo County perceived around the state? As a state legislator you probably got a lot of feedback from individuals around the state as to how they perceive different areas of the state. How were we thought of?

CONRAD: Primarily, as an extremely strong labor-oriented community. This came about because, I think, back in the '20s and in the 'teens it was a strictly coal-mining settlement. And, of course, the miners had been known for years for their strikes. This was one of the things.

And then when we had the city-wide strike in 1935, that cast a so-called stigma on the community as a labor town. Then when some of the national publications wrote the article about the houses of prostitution and hung the name "Sin City" on the city of Terre Haute, why I had a lot of comment in the legislature about that. Then the Chamber of Commerce elected a general, I think, from the air guard as president of the Chamber of Commerce. I got ribbed about that quite a bit. /The question was, "Didn't we have any businessmen in the city of Terre Haute that were qualified to act as president of the Chamber of Commerce?" But that's about all. And then, of course, you took the usual ribbing from the Republicans that this was a Democrat community.

CONRAD: But when I first went over there, we had two state senators from Vigo County -- Jack O'Grady and I. The first twelve years in the senate I represented Vigo County only. Then in 1968 I represented Vigo County, Sullivan County, Clay and Vermillion.

Then when I ran in '72, why I had to go into parts of Putnam County and parts of Greene County and Owen County, Sullivan County, Clay County, Vigo County -- I think parts of six counties. And the reapportionment this past legislature gets this county set up now where we'll have five different state representatives representing Vigo County. Senator [Ed] Pease from Clay County who at the present time represents part of Vigo, will no longer represent any of Vigo County. Senator [William C.] Dunbar whose district will still take in part of Vigo County and the rest of it would go south all the way down into Knox County. [This is] just a pure, simple case of gerrymandering so that the Republican party can, as they say, guarantee themselves 30 seats in the senate and some 60-65 seats in the house, which would give them control of the two houses of legislature for probably the next ten years.

DM: Did you find it hard to get Vigo County's fair share of what was being allocated by the state because we were a Democrat county in a Republican state?

CONRAD: They split it up so that the majority of these districts will be Republican or practically even. And then they feel that if the swing is Republican, why they'll pick up those even categories. And otherwise, even in a Democratic sweep, why they'll still get some Republican representation over there.

DM: In what ways did the county suffer because of its Democratic bias? Roads or . . .

CONRAD: Well, I think the general public suffered more than anyone from redistricting in the manner it was done now. Probably 75% or 80% of the people won't know who their representative is. And you got five representatives representing different parts of this county. If you got one or two or three, why then you know who to go to talk to. For instance, they've split Lost Creek township into two state representative districts. One representative is going to have

CONRAD: three precincts and the other one's going to have two. Well, you could live on this side . . . on the south side of U.S. 40 and you've got a different representative than your neighbor across the street. And you talk to the guy on the other side of the street and he'll say, "I'm not your representative." So it is confusing.

DM: You were active in Vigo County politics during the time that the Vietnam War was an issue. How did local officials react to the war? And how did it affect local politics? Was it much of an issue at the time?

CONRAD: I don't think it was too much of an issue around here. We had some small demonstrations at the University. But so far as the local political picture was concerned, I don't think it had any bearing on it. The majority of these youngsters in this . . . you regret to say these things, but we give them the privilege in this country of voting at 18, and they don't take the opportunity to exercise their right.

DM: Over the years there have been attempts to create overpasses and parking garages in the downtown area. Most of these have failed. Why do you feel we haven't ever been able to really achieve anything as far as parking and overpasses in the city are concerned?

CONRAD: Well, if you look at the overall picture of this county, the west side of Indiana I think has always been short-changed by the Indiana legislature, and the eastern side of Illinois's been short-changed by the Illinois legislature. And one classic example, the last section of Interstate 70 to be completed was the west side of Indiana -- Terre Haute; the last section of Interstate 70 in Illinois was the eastern side. So, this section right down this line, I've contended for years, was short-changed both by the state of Indiana and by the state of Illinois.

I think another good example is Indiana State University. They've never received the monies they should have received in comparison to what Purdue and Indiana University have received from the state of Indiana. Matter of fact, I tried to get all the senators that lived along the western side of the

CONRAD: state to vote in a block against certain legislation that might come up in an effort to call attention to the fact that we felt that we were short-changed over here. But I was never successful in getting it done.

DM: Why does this part of the state have such a low degree of power in legislation?

CONRAD: Well, with the exception of Lake County and Vanderburgh County, we're sparsely populated. And whether the city of Indianapolis likes it or not, the legislature is pretty much Marion County oriented.

And then you have the big metropolitan area surrounding Indianapolis. And they have a large number of representatives and senators in the legislature, and they get their way.

DM: Do you remember the installation of parking meters in Terre Haute when they were put in?

CONRAD: They were put in under Tucker, I'm sure of that. But I can't . . .

DM: I think it was in the late '40s. I was just wondering . . .

CONRAD: I think that's probably true.

DM: . . . if you remembered anything about public reaction to it. Whether there was a lot of . . .

CONRAD: Oh, it was going to cost money, so I would assume that most of the public were opposed to it. Of course, in those days, why a lot of the employees up town would park all day and that was the biggest gripe.

DM: There have been periodic changes in the quality of various transportation systems through Vigo County and Terre Haute over the years. Of course, the four-laning of Highway 41, the deterioration of the railroad system, improvements at the airport and movement of the airport out to the east side of town, and the building of Interstate 70 -- how have these changes in transportation in your opinion

DM: affected the business climate in this area? Of course, we can talk about the logical one -- I-70 -- first.

CONRAD: Well, I think the business climate has been affected, and I assume you're talking about small merchandisers on Wabash Avenue. And I don't think our problem is any more unique here than it is anywhere else in the country. It is that the shopping centers have simply killed the downtown districts in most localities.

When you stop and think -- or I can think back this far, probably you can't -- but back in the '30s you could get off the bus or you could get off of the streetcar and usually within two blocks of your home you could find a grocery store or you could find a corner drugstore and in a lot of cases a corner shoe cobbler and a lot of things that you can't find there any more. So, matter of fact, you've got to have an automobile to get to the grocery store in most cases. I suppose 97%-98% of the people in this community would need an automobile to get groceries. And this has affected the transportation system. If you have an automobile, you're going to drive it to work. If you could ride a bus or a streetcar and get off and pick up your groceries as you're walking home a block or two, you'd probably still do that.

I don't think I-70 hurt the downtown area. I've often wondered what would happen with the traffic we have today on I-70 if it was still on U.S. 40. If you come in from Seelyville, it'd probably take you an hour to get from Fruitridge Avenue to 7th and Wabash. And you'd never get out of the city of Indianapolis because before I-70 was completed, if you came out of Indianapolis from the State House on Washington coming to Terre Haute, you could figure that it was going to take you at least a half hour to forty-five minutes to get out of Indianapolis. It was that congested. And if you had all the traffic you've got today stuck on 40, you never would get out.

DM: Um hm. That makes sense.

LEONARD CONRAD
Tape 1-Side 2

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DM: Well, I think that pretty well takes care of
 the interview, doesn't it?

CONRAD: O.K.

END OF TAPE

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